



# United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE  
Grand Canyon National Park  
P.O. Box 129  
Grand Canyon, Arizona 86023-0129

IN REPLY REFER TO:

D18 (GRCA 8211)

Dear Interested Party:

Reference: Request for Comments on Initial Proposed Action (General Scoping)

Subject: Rehabilitation/Replacement and Maintenance of Backcountry Toilets

The National Park Service (NPS) is in the initial stages of planning for the rehabilitation/replacement and maintenance of toilets that currently exist in the backcountry of Grand Canyon National Park.

**a. Purpose and Need for Action:** This project proposal is a subset of a larger park-wide restroom rehabilitation project. The primary purpose of the park-wide project is to address the fact that most restrooms in the park are old, over-crowded, and/or not up to current standards. Many facilities are no longer meeting the needs of visitors, due to dramatic increases in visitation rates to the park since 1984. The primary complaint received from visitors is the inadequacy of the restroom facilities.

The current Backcountry Management Plan allows toilets in Threshold and some Primitive Management Zones as a means for dealing with localized problems. Many of the existing backcountry toilets are substandard pit toilets that expose park employees to unsanitary conditions while cleaning and servicing these toilets. An improvement in the safety and health risks to employees maintaining these toilets, as well as the visitors who use them, is needed.

**b. Proposed Action:** The scope of this project includes two parts

1. Replacement and/or Rehabilitation of Existing Toilets. There are a total of eleven toilets in the backcountry. Ten of these are proposed for replacement and/or rehabilitation, and include Horseshoe Mesa (2), Monument Creek, Upper Tapeats, Tanner, Deer Creek, Clear Creek, Salt Creek, Horn Creek, and Waldron Basin (see table on next page). Work at some sites will include the removal of existing pit toilets, installation of aboveground vault toilets, installation of privacy screening (if natural screening is not adequate), and all associated site rehab/revegetation. The design proposed for these toilets is an aboveground vault, similar to the "Romtec" toilets currently in use at several sites in Grand Canyon National Park. An aboveground system is preferred in proposed wilderness areas because it can be installed with very minimal ground disturbance and can be removed at any time, with little noticeable impact to the site. These vaults are easy to install on site, and can either be flown in by helicopter or carried in via mule, boat, or backpack, depending on location. These are relatively small units, about the same size as the units currently in place, and have a capacity of approximately 750 gallons.

2. Maintenance of Existing Backcountry Toilets. Because of the remote location of many of these toilets, and the fact that they are all within proposed wilderness, maintenance options are limited. The toilets are currently maintained by park staff, often involving park staff being exposed to human waste while shoveling out the toilets and transporting the contents out of the inner canyon to be disposed of appropriately. With the installation of new aboveground vault toilets at all backcountry sites and the

removal of all existing substandard pit toilets, maintenance options would increase. Park staff believes that installation of the aboveground toilets would improve maintenance standards and reduce the number of times that the toilets need to be emptied each year. For some of the higher use areas, like Horseshoe Mesa, toilets may need to be emptied or replaced twice a year.

#### Backcountry Toilets - Grand Canyon National Park.

Site and Existing Condition	Proposed Action
Horseshoe Mesa – currently has 1 functioning pit, 1 non-functional pit and 1 Romtec vault.	Remove the 2 existing pits; install one new vault toilet at large group site; install new screening at existing vault at small group site; associated revegetation and/or site work
Monument Creek – currently has 1 large pit with 2 seats.	Remove existing large pit; install vaults to keep capacity equal to existing; associated screening, revegetation and/or site work
Upper Tapeats – currently has 1 Romtec vault	Install screening and do some minor site work for existing vault
Tanner – currently has 1 Romtec vault	Re-evaluate the site and how well the toilet is functioning; move toilet if deemed necessary (but toilet would remain in same general area)
Deer Creek – currently has 1 Romtec vault	Install screening and do some minor site work for existing vault
Clear Creek – currently has 1 pit toilet	Remove existing pit; install one new vault; associated revegetation and/or site work
Salt Creek – currently has 1 outhouse	Remove existing outhouse; install one new vault; associated revegetation and/or site work
Horn Creek- currently has 1 outhouse	Remove existing outhouse; install one new vault; associated revegetation and/or site work
Hermit Creek – currently has 1 composting toilet	Continued maintenance
Waldron Basin – currently has historic toilet at Santa Maria Springs, essentially non-functional	Install one new vault at Hermit Trail/Dripping Springs Trail junction to replace Santa Maria Springs toilet and to address increased day use at the trail junction; associated revegetation and/or site work

Most of the Grand Canyon backcountry (not including the Cross-Canyon Corridor) lies within proposed wilderness. NPS policies require that these proposed areas be managed under the provisions of the Wilderness Act. As such, the maintenance of backcountry toilets falls under the “minimum tool concept,” which allows for park superintendents to select the method or administrative practice necessary to successfully and safely accomplish the management objectives with the least impact on wilderness character and resources. A “Minimum Requirement Analysis” will be conducted to determine the minimum tools or methods necessary for both the installation and long-term maintenance of these toilets in proposed wilderness. Options that will be evaluated during this process include the use of helicopters, mules, backpacks, and boats, or a combination of these methods, depending on the site.

**c. Planning and Management History:** Grand Canyon National Park is managing proposed wilderness areas in the park under the direction of NPS Management Policy, Director’s Order #41, Wilderness Preservation and Management and specific guidance including Grand Canyon National Park’s 1995 General Management Plan and the 1988 Backcountry Management Plan. An effort was undertaken in 1997-1998 to revise the backcountry management plan, including the drafting of an environmental assessment, resulting in the 1998 Draft Wilderness Management Plan. This 1998 draft has not been finalized however. The 1998 draft addresses the issue of toilets in proposed wilderness and has designated various management zones guiding management in the backcountry. The management zones and the presence of toilets at each of these sites is consistent with direction outlined in the 1988 plan.

In summary, the overall scope of this proposed action is to replace/rehabilitate toilets that currently exist in proposed wilderness, consistent with current direction in the 1995 GMP and 1988 Backcountry Management Plan, and to determine the most appropriate means of maintaining them in the future. The proposal does not include modifications to existing use patterns in the backcountry.

Before we begin the environmental analysis for this project, we would like to hear your viewpoints on the actions and any issues or concerns you have regarding the proposal. Please send your comments to the address below, or email Sara White, Compliance Officer, at [sara\\_white@nps.gov](mailto:sara_white@nps.gov) no later than November 26, 2001.

Grand Canyon National Park/Superintendent  
Attn: Sara White, Compliance Officer  
P.O. Box 129  
Grand Canyon, AZ 86023

Please be aware that names and addresses of respondents may be released if requested under the Freedom of Information Act. Our practice is to make comments, including names and home addresses of respondents, available for public review during regular business hours. Individual respondents may request that we withhold their home address from the record, which we will honor to the extent allowable by law. There also may be circumstances in which we would withhold from the record a respondent's identity, as allowable by law. If you wish us to withhold your name and/or address, you must state this prominently at the beginning of your comment. We will make all submissions from organizations or businesses, and from individuals identifying themselves as representatives or officials of organizations or businesses, available for public inspection in their entirety. Anonymous comments may be included in the public record. However, the National Park Service is not legally required to consider or respond to anonymous comments.

We appreciate your input on this proposal. If you have any questions regarding the project, please call Linda Jalbert, Wilderness Planner, at (928) 638-7909 or Debbie Lutch, Environmental Protection Specialist, at (928) 774-0095.

Sincerely,

Joseph F. Alston  
Superintendent

Enclosures 2  
Vicinity Map - Grand Canyon National Park  
Topographical Maps - Grand Canyon National Park

**If you would like to receive a hard copy of the Environmental Assessment for this project when it is complete, please contact Sara White at the address above, at (928) 638-7956, or at [sara\\_white@nps.gov](mailto:sara_white@nps.gov), and one will be sent to you during the comment period. If you do not respond to this request, a hard copy of the EA will not be sent to you. However, please be aware this Environmental Assessment (when complete) and other environmental documents are routinely available on the Grand Canyon National Park website at [www.nps.gov/grca/mgmt/](http://www.nps.gov/grca/mgmt/).**

Vicinity Map - Grand Canyon National Park





















